

*BS Nagesh, non-executive vice chairman of Shoppers Stop, an Indian retail company, established the Trust for Retailers and Retail Associates of India (TRRAIN) in 2011, to empower people in retail and bring lasting change in the lives of retail associates in India.*

*People play a pivotal role in retail, one of the largest industries globally. In the US, retail supports almost 42 million jobs – about one in four – and contributes \$2.6 trillion to the country's GDP. In India, retail currently employs over 43 million people and is among the fastest growing industry sectors that has witnessed remarkable transformation over the last two decades.*

*The 'people' factor lies at the heart of retail. If your retail staff is happy, they will engage with customers and satisfy them, thereby generating better sales for*



## The 'people' focus in retail

*your company. To be happy, they must feel valued and should be well taken care of. Only then will they create the positive ambience that builds customer loyalty.*

*One of TRRAIN's flagship programmes is Retail Employees' Day (RED), held annually on December 12 in partnership with the Retailers Association of India. An India-specific initiative that has spread to Turkey, RED celebrates the efforts of retail employees in member establishments in the participating country. The UAE joined the initiative in 2016.*

***Rupkatha Bhowmick** spoke with the Business Excellence Department of Dubai's Department of Economic Development (DED) about its partnership with TRRAIN to introduce RED in the UAE*





RED celebrations in Turkey

RED celebrations at Orion Mall, India



Shaikha Ahmad Al Bishri

*Over 4 million people in India and Turkey have celebrated RED until 2015. With the UAE coming on board in 2016, we have added 35 nationalities to the initiative.*

"We were impressed by the way TRRAIN launched this initiative in India and Turkey. We saw this as a great opportunity to partner with TRRAIN to bring RED to the UAE," says Shaikha Ahmad Al Bishri, director of DED's Business Excellence Department.

"RED is not a one-day event. It's about creating a positive and happy environment all-year-round by taking care of retail associates. If retail associates are happy, they make customers happy. If customers are happy, business grows and benefits the economy. When all of us are happy, we can achieve our goal of becoming the happiest country in the world," she adds.

The Business Excellence Department sent messages to the 2,000 or so retailers who are members of its Dubai Service Excellence Scheme (DSES), urging them to celebrate the day and share stories of their celebrations under the hashtag #BEDforRED. The objective is to build a culture within retail organisations that appreciates the efforts of employees through the year.

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in India and Turkey have celebrated RED until 2015. With the UAE coming on board in 2016, we have added over 35 nationalities to the initiative," Al Bishri emphasises.

"We had little time to publicise RED's message but it was heartening to see around 10-15 businesses in the UAE, representing around 40 brands, participating in the celebrations. They included Apparel Group, Majid Al Futtaim, Axiom Telecom, UAE Exchange, Al Ansari Exchange and Aafaq Islamic Finance, among others," she continues.

"We felt the time was right to build awareness about RED among our member retail outlets," says Al Bishri. "Retail contributes a large share of Dubai's GDP and is also the leading employer in the emirates. People in retail work hard to generate business for their companies and help them retain their clientele. They engage with customers and build the loyalty that nurtures their company's consumer base. If you look after your people, they will look after your business – it's that simple."

"We would like to grow our collaboration with

### The DSES report and award

DED's Business Excellence Department has been working under the patronage of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, vice president and prime minister of the UAE and ruler of Dubai, for the past 22 years. It organises three awards ceremonies – the Dubai Quality Awards that focus on quality in the UAE's public and private sector; the Dubai Human Development Award that focuses on HR and how employees can be developed within an organisation; and the DSES, which, as the name suggests, focuses on building customer service by reviewing and assessing retail outlets in the UAE.

"We conduct mystery shopping at over 2,000 of our member retail outlets for the DSES award. They cover 184 brands in 90 retail companies across 18 categories such as fashion, footwear, food service, jewellery, leisure & entertainment, money exchange and travel & tourism. The number of brands and categories keeps growing. We submit a report at the end of each quarter that highlights the performance of each retail outlet and its employees. The review helps them to evaluate their performance and pinpoint areas for improvement," Al Bishri explains.

TRRAIN, first in the UAE and then beyond. That's well in the realm of possibility because retail groups in this region partner with the who's who in retail globally. Once the local groups begin celebrating RED, the word will



**Seema Sequeira**

*Your workforce wants appreciation, whether you're in retail or any other industry. If you appreciate their efforts, the message spreads, inspiring other businesses to do the same.*

spread, encouraging other international brands to join hands with us," she feels.

"The UAE is a melting pot of cultures, with people from different nationalities coming to live and work in the emirates," observes Seema Sequeira, senior specialist, Business Excellence Department. "They come with different expectations so motivating them in a multicultural work environment takes a lot of creative thinking. But there are many simple things that businesses can do to make their associates feel special. It could be writing appreciation notes, cutting a cake on their birthdays, giving gift vouchers or travel tickets. Appreciation can be shown in many ways to reinforce trust in the company."

"Commemorating RED is also a good way to make people feel special and acknowledge the value they



**RED celebrations at Imagica, India**



**RED celebrations in Turkey**

add to business," she adds.

"Your workforce wants appreciation, whether you're in retail or any other industry," Sequeira continues. "If you appreciate their efforts, the message spreads, inspiring other businesses to do the same. If one retailer in a shopping mall commemorates RED, there will be a snowballing effect, with others also joining the celebrations. Such appreciation boosts morale and inspires associates to enter into more meaningful conversations with customers and upgrade the services they offer."

Worker retention is high priority in an industry like retail where worker attrition rates are high. Enhancing career advancement plans is good strategy for worker retention. This requires more learning and development opportunities, more so in the UAE's multicultural environment where the

majority of workers in the private sector are expatriates.

"Both the large retail groups and the smaller ones under DSES focus on learning and development schemes. We prepare a report on these schemes, rate the units covered, then share the findings with our members every quarter. The ratings cover a range of elements that include physical appearance of the store, branding, pricing, cross selling of products down to the vital element of offering an enjoyable customer experience and making the sale. If the ratings improve, that's great. If not, businesses get the opportunity to plug the gaps. We also have a 'Happiness Meter' to gauge the level of customer satisfaction in all the retail outlets under DSES," Al Bishri shares.

"Training and development is a measurable input. Most retailers like the Apparel Group, Landmark Group,

Majid Al Futtaim and UAE Exchange implement initiatives like shopfloor and classroom trainings. The Apparel Group even simulates a retail environment – it could be a Nine West or Aldo store – in their training room to offer a 'real-time' experience in their classroom trainings," Sequeira complements.

"The competition in every retail category is tremendous," Al Bishri points out. "Given the diverse workforce – nationality, religion, culture, expectations – training and development becomes all the more challenging. The workers have to be brought on the same platform to inculcate a unified view of the company's goals and objectives. All this cannot be put down in a process manual, given the range of differences. Hence, training as well as initiatives like RED will go a long way in retaining the best talent." ■